

Soldiers in Ancient China



The Chinese dynasties were frequently established through wars and rebellions. The practice of war became a necessary part of life. The Chinese military was composed of general, officers, archers, the cavalry, charioteers, armored infantry, and foot soldiers.

Chinese soldiers selected a specific weapon of their choice and practiced "sets". The set were a sequence of movements that would create a oneness between the soldier and his weapon. Learning sets taught the soldier how to work in unison with other soldiers. Since most Chinese were unable to read or write, skills were passed on through a system of memorization. This was done through song, reciting poems, and performing traditional sets devised for a particular weapon. It was similar to the sequenced rifle practices that are performed by contemporary military soldiers.

Some of the weapons that the Chinese soldiers used were swords, spears, the mace, the *Shu*, the *Qiang*, and the crossbow. There were many types of swords such as the *Jian*, which was called the "sovereign of the blades." Spears are considered to be the oldest weapons used in China. They were originally used by those riding horseback, but eventually foot soldiers also carried spears that ranged from 9 to 18 feet long. These long spears allowed soldiers to reach their enemies while keeping them at bay.



The mace was a short weapon made of iron that featured a diamond-like arrangement of knobs on its head. They were swung through the air to chop and cut an enemy. The Chinese also used a weapon called a *Shu*. This was a metal-headed bamboo club that was carried by the honor guards who protected the emperor.

The Chinese also invented the crossbow. It was a deadly weapon and destroyed an enemy's ranks by a massive deluge of short arrows tipped with bronze, iron, or bone heads. Its arrows could pierce a wooden shield, and since most peasant soldiers did not wear armor, these crossbow attacks were lethal. Most battles were hand-to-hand combat. Fearless fighters would enter the fray of battle with axes, swords and other dangerous weapons.